



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
Administration**

Petty Creek Road Project *Newsletter*

Western Federal Lands Highway Division

Volume 1

Introduction

This is the first newsletter for the Petty Creek Road improvement project. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will be working very closely with Missoula County, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and the USDA Forest Service – Lolo National Forest (LNF) to determine the best ways to improve the road from the intersection of South Side Road to the crossing of East Fork Petty Creek, approximately 11.8 miles total length.

A number of environmental and engineering studies will be done over the next year to determine the most feasible alternative with the fewest negative impacts. More newsletters will be sent at regular intervals in the future to keep everyone with an interest in the Petty Creek Road Project updated as to the status of these studies and of the project in general.

The Petty Creek Road Project

Montana Forest Highway Route 71, commonly known as Petty Creek Road, begins at the junction of Interstate 90, approximately 20 miles west of Missoula, and continues to the junction with US 12 in Missoula County. This project involves improvements to a portion of the route between MP 0.0 at the intersection with South Side Road and ending at the crossing of East Fork Petty Creek at MP 11.8.

Petty Creek Road provides primary access to 43,500 acres of National Forest Service (NFS) land on the

Lolo National Forest and is a major timber hauling corridor connecting US Route 12 and Interstate 90.

This road is also a primary access for the residents along the road who commute daily to the cities of Alberton and Frenchtown to work. Petty Creek Road provides access to Garden Point Jeep Road and several other trailheads, including Petty Mountain Trailhead.

The road is under the jurisdiction and maintenance of Missoula County, and is open to public travel on a year-round basis.

Gravel surfacing exists along the length of the road. Dust, potholing and wash boarding of the gravel surface have been problems in the past.

The road is below design standards for the traffic type, volume and speed.

The gravel surface also causes a high amount of sediment to enter Petty Creek during runoff events and grading operations, resulting in nega-



Petty Creek Road

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Western Federal Lands Highway Division

This project will be designed and constructed by Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD). WFLHD is a small branch of the Federal Highway Administration that is involved in the planning, design and construction of roads that provide safe and adequate transportation access to and through Federally owned lands.

Although the majority of our work is for the Forest Service, we also have projects with the National Park Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. WFLHD's jurisdiction includes the northwestern states of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

Our office is located in Vancouver, Washington (see contact names and address below).



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tive impacts to resident fish.

One alternative to be explored within the projects National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process will be to upgrade the existing road geometry, provide an all-weather asphalt surface, and provide striping and signing to meet current design and safety standards. The roadway centerline may be shifted slightly in some areas to create a vegetative buffer zone to help filter out any roadway produced sediment before the water enters Petty Creek. These changes will involve some roadway widening and some horizontal curve flattening to meet current safety standards. Three bridges have been determined to be sub-standard due to narrow width, channel conveyance, and freeboard. Additionally, the bridges lack curbs, which allow surface runoff to flow directly into the stream. These will be replaced as part of this alternative

Overall, the intent of the project is to help improve access to the National Forest Lands and to the residents along the route. It will improve the quality of the water and the air in the Petty Creek watershed by reducing the amount of gravel roadway produced stream turbidity and dust. Upgrading the road to the current design standards will improve drivability and reduce maintenance costs. This would allow Missoula County's valuable maintenance funds to be used on other roadways in their jurisdiction.

The projects development is still in the early stage, and many specific questions about the project can't be

answered without further environmental and engineering investigation and design. All project stakeholders will have opportunities to voice their concerns and have an effect on the final project outcome.

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Q&A



This project was proposed by Missoula County in conjunction with the Lolo National Forest.

Q: Where was the funding obtained for this project?

A: The funding for this project is through Forest Highway Funds from the Public Lands Highway Program. This project was initially nominated by Missoula County in conjunction with the Lolo National Forest. The nomination was evaluated and then accepted into the Forest Highway Program by members of a Tri-Agency committee, which include representatives from the State of Montana, The Forest Service, and the FHWA. The primary purpose of the Forest Highway Program is to provide funding for public roads that serve the transportation needs of the Federal Lands which are not a State or local government responsibility.

Q: Why can't this money be used elsewhere in the County, where the need may be greater?

A: The funding for this project is earmarked at the Federal level. It can only be used on road projects that meet a set of specific criteria. Missoula County and the Lolo National Forest nominated this project based on prioritizing the needs of the roads in their jurisdictions that meet these criteria. Without their nomination, and the acceptance into the Forest Highway Program, the money would be lost to projects in other Counties, Forests or States.

Q: At what point will the agencies involved take formal comment from the property owners and the public?

A: The agencies will take comments from property owners and the public throughout the environmental clearance process. Prior to the preparation of an environmental document, our agency prepares a project checklist. The project checklist describes the need, scope, alternatives being considered, an initial esti-

mate of environmental resources, potential impacts, and related issues. The information in the checklist helps determine what kind of environmental document is required for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Typically, we conduct at least one public meeting during the checklist phase. For the Petty Creek project, the checklist is currently scheduled to be completed in 2004.

Q: How much is this going to cost?

A: The early estimate to construct this project, based on widening, paving, some spot curve flattening, and replacement of three bridges, is approximately \$3.7 million. This estimate may change significantly after selection of the preferred alternative within the environmental document.

Q: What are the stakes in the ground and what were the survey crews doing last summer?

A: The stakes are control points for the survey to establish existing topography and the existing roadway. These stakes are not related to any cut, fill, or right-of-way stakes.

Project Schedule

The Proposed schedule for the project is as follows:

Public Involvement	Ongoing throughout project
Topographical Survey	Completed Fall of 2002
Geotechnical Exploration and Testing	Summer of 2004 to Fall of 2004
Project Checklist	Fall of 2004
Environmental Studies and Documents (NEPA)	Ongoing thru Spring of 2005

Tentative Schedule If A Build Alternative Is Chosen

Right-of-Way Negotiation	2006
Final Roadway Design Completed	Spring of 2006
Construction	Starting Spring 2007

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